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VIII.—*An Account of the Discovery of a Human Skeleton beneath a Bed of Peat on the Coast of Cheshire.* By G. Busk, F.R.S., Vice-President of the Ethnological Society.

[*Read February 7th*, 1865.]

The skeleton I am about to describe was found on the Cheshire shore at the extremity of the tongue of land lying between the estuaries of the Dee and of the Mersey a little to the right hand of Leasowe Castle, the seat of Sir Edward Cust, by whom intelligence of the discovery was first made known to Sir Charles Lyell, at whose recommendation Sir Edward Cust secured the skeleton, and has deposited it in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

In a memorandum of the discovery furnished by Sir Edward Cust, dated February 22nd, it is stated "that the skeleton must have lain until about a twelvemonth nearly a hundred feet below the surface, a very little to the right hand of Leasowe Castle, near Birkenhead. When first discovered it was lying in a mixture of blue clay and sand, about five feet beneath the surface of the peat deposit and upon a body of solid blue clay containing many boulder stones of considerable size, and which itself stands upon a hard, utterly unfruitful red marl. At the spot there was formerly a sand-hill of some altitude, greatly exceeding that of the rest of the sand-hill range. Supposing these sand-hills to be of no greater antiquity than the time of the Romans, it may be useful to remark that the Iter Antoninum, in describing the western shore of England, names the existence of *four* estuaries where there are now five. The Dee, the Ribble, the Lune, the Solway, and the Mersey. The first four have marks such as Deva and Castrum, which, as regards the Dee, denote that that estuary could not have been overlooked, and it would be still more remarkable if the Mersey, which is now by far the most important of the five, could have been so. One of the theories that have been started upon the supposition that the Mersey was nevertheless the omitted stream is, that at the period it flowed along the Cheshire shore and fell into the Dee before it formed its estuary. According to this theory, the spot in which the skeleton has been found, might have been near the left bank of the Mersey river."

"The peat deposit," Sir Edward Cust remarks, "contains much timber, sound enough for modern use, and the bones and horns of animals; but these have been found *in* the peat and not *below* it. There was no appearance that the peat soil had ever been disturbed where the skeleton lay."

From some observations in a further communication from Sir Edward it would appear that formerly, and even within his own recollection, the sea was several hundred yards in front of the sand-hill whose removal by the waves, uncovered the peat bed beneath which the skeleton was found. And there was, until within this year, an extent of peat about one mile and a half from Leasow Castle, in which the roots of trees in their natural position stood up some feet; but these are nearly all now destroyed by the advancing tide which is rapidly encroaching on the shore.

The nature of the locality in which the skeleton was found will be best seen by reference to a coloured ordnance map, from which it will be perceived that the whole of the shore in the neighbourhood of Leasowe is, except at the point opposite the castle itself and to the west of it for a short distance, covered by blown sand, which at the part in question appears to have been washed away, as stated by Sir Edward Cust, rendering the protection of the shore by an artificial embankment necessary. The entire country between the two estuaries is formed of the new red sandstone formation apparently overlain in parts by a considerable thickness of boulder clay which on the shore of the estuary of the Dee forms cliffs of some height. This, it may be assumed, is also the stiff blue clay with large boulders, described by Sir E. Cust as underlying the peat and resting upon the red marl. The skeleton, therefore, would seem to have lain immediately upon the boulder clay, and consequently we may assume that in all probability the owner perished at the time when the peat was a soft bog. The extent of this ancient bog and forest is indicated—perhaps with some correctness, by the extent of the alluvium indicated in the map, and pretty nearly corresponding with the confines of the course of the Birket—a stream which represents the drainage of the district and empties itself into Wallasey Pool and reaches the Mersey at Birkenhead. At what period the ancient forest which formerly occupied this district perished, we have probably no means of ascertaining; but it perhaps need not have been extremely remote; and it is a curious circumstance that some tradition of its existence appears still to be maintained among the people, as testified by the doggerel which says that—

> "From Birkenhead unto Hilbre,
> A squirrel might jump from tree to tree."

We may be allowed to suppose that the owner of the skeleton might have witnessed this, and here followed the chase of the deer, and perhaps of the wild ox in the then wilderness; at any rate, as we shall see from his bodily conformation, he was well adapted for the pursuit of the chase.

With respect to the skeleton itself, when found it is described as lying extended and to have been entire. Some few of the bones are now wanting; but what remain suffice to give us an excellent idea of what manner of man it belonged to.

The bones are of the usual deep olive-black colour usually observed in peat-bones, and as is also usual in such bones they are hard, tough, and elastic. No analysis of them has been made; but there can be no doubt that they contain a large amount of animal matter.

When first observed, the length of the skeleton was estimated at six feet two inches; but upon comparison of the length of some of the bones with other skeletons, it would appear that the real height was somewhat less—probably about 5 ft. 10 in. or 5 ft. 11 in. The bones, generally, denote a man of great muscular power and well-formed, except perhaps in one respect, for it would seem that the clavicles and ribs are disproportionately slender in comparison with the rest of the skeleton.

The following are the dimensions of the cranium :—

1.	Length	7·6
2.	Breadth	5·9
3.	Height	5·7 ?
4.	Least frontal breadth	3·9
5.	Greatest frontal breadth	5·0 ?
6.	Parietal breadth	5·7
7.	Occipital breadth	4·75
8.	Zygomatic breadth	5·1
9.	Frontal radius	4·8
10.	Vertical „	4·7
11.	Parietal „	5·0 ?
12.	Occipital „	4·5
13.	Maxillary „	3·8
14.	Fronto-nasal „	3·85
15.	Circumference	21·5
16.	Longitudinal arc	15·5
17.	„ frontal	5·4
18.	„ parietal	5·2
19.	„ occipital	4·9
20.	Frontal transverse arc	12·9
21.	Vertical do. „	13·3
22.	Parietal do. „	13·8
23.	Occipital do. „	12·0

From which it is evident that the cranium is dolichocephalic, orthognathic, and aphanozygous.

1. *Norma lateralis.*—In the side view there is seen to be a considerable supra-orbital projection; the forehead is high and rounded; the vertical region straight, and the occiput considerably produced; the mastoid processes are large and strong, and the lower jaw nearly rectangular.

2. *Norma occipitalis.*—The outline in this view is rounded,

and the line of greatest breadth below the middle; the lambdoidal suture is closed in the middle, as is the sagittal suture; the superior occipital spine well developed.

3. *Norma frontalis.*—Forehead somewhat pyramidal; frontal sinuses strongly marked, and the supra-orbital border beyond them thickened and prominent; orbits suborbicular, but much broken; nasals wanting.

4. *Norma verticalis.*—General outline rounded oval; aphanozygous; a large part of the parietals wanting.

5. *Norma basalis.*—Alveolar border rather straight in front; remaining teeth regular, much worn, and flat; mastoid processes thick; the greater part of the central portion of the base, including nearly the entire foramen magnum, wanting.

The following are the dimensions of some of the other bones:—

1. *Femur.*		2. *Humerus.*	
Length	18·0	Length	13·4
Least diameter	1·1	Least diameter	0·7
Width at condyles	3·2	Width at condyles	2·75
„ at upper end	3·9	„ of head	2·9

3. *Radius.*		4. *Ulna.*	
Length	10·1	Length	10·9
Width at distal end	1·4	Width at proximal end	1·2
Diameter of head	0·9		

Pelvis.	
Width	11·25

Figures of the cranium will appear in my *Crania Prisca.*